

Please amend the claims as follows:

70. (Twice Amended) A gene expression system comprising:

- (a) an IF gene of a *Lactobacillus* species;
- (b) a SakK gene of a *Lactobacillus* species;
- (c) a SakR gene of a *Lactobacillus* species;
- (d) a cloned polynucleotide of interest linked to a first inducible promoter,

wherein in said gene expression system, the expression product of the IF gene activates the expression product of the SakK gene, and the activated expression product of the SakK gene activates the expression product of the SakR gene, and the activated expression product of the SakR gene induces the first inducible promoter of the gene of interest,

thereby causing expression of the gene of interest;

wherein said the expression product of said IF gene is not a lantibiotic; and

wherein the IF gene is expressed from a promoter different from the promoter from which the SakK gene and/or the SakR gene are expressed; and

wherein the first inducible promoter comprises two repeated nucleotide sequences 5 to 10 nucleotides long and spaced 17 to 23 nucleotides apart, wherein the downstream member of said repeated sequence is located 30 to 38 nucleotides upstream from a -10 region of a bacterial gene, and wherein said repeated

nucleotide sequences are selected from the group consisting of residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:6, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:7, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:8, residues 7-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:9, and residues 7-8, 10-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:10.

73. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 70, wherein the SakK gene and the SakR gene are operably linked to a constitutive promoter.

74. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 73, wherein the first inducible promoter and gene of interest are on a first vector and the SakK gene and the SakR gene are operably linked to a constitutive promoter located on a second vector separate from the first vector.

75. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 70, wherein the SakK gene and the SakR gene are operably linked to a second inducible promoter.

76. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 75, wherein the first inducible promoter and gene of interest are on a first vector and the SakK gene and the SakR gene are operably linked to a second inducible promoter located on a second vector.

78. (Amended) A host cell comprising the gene expression system of claim 70.

90. (Amended) A kit for gene expression comprising:

- a) at least one vector comprising (i) a promoter that can be induced by the expression product of a SakR gene of a *Lactobacillus* species, wherein the SakR expression product is activated by the expression product of a SakK gene of a *Lactobacillus* species, wherein the SakK expression product is activated by the expression product of an IF gene of a *Lactobacillus* species, wherein the promoter comprises two repeated nucleotide sequences 5 to 10 nucleotides long and spaced 17 to 23 nucleotides apart, wherein the downstream member of said repeated sequence is located 30 to 38 nucleotides upstream from a -10 region of a bacterial gene, and wherein said repeated nucleotide sequences are selected from the group consisting of residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:6, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:7, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:8, residues 7-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:9, and residues 7-8, 10-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:10; and (ii) a cloning site; and
- b) a host strain having a chromosome comprising a SakK gene of a *Lactobacillus* species and a SakR gene of a *Lactobacillus* species.

92. (Amended) The kit of claim 90, further comprising c) a peptide comprising the amino acid sequence of residues 19-37 of SEQ ID NO:3.

95. (Amended) A gene expression system comprising:

- (a) an IF peptide of a *Lactobacillus* species;
- (b) a SakK gene of a *Lactobacillus* species;
- (c) a SakR gene of a *Lactobacillus* species;
- (d) a cloned polynucleotide of interest linked to a first inducible promoter,

wherein in said gene expression system, the the IF peptide activates the expression product of the SakK gene, and the activated expression product of the SakK gene activates the expression product of the SakR gene, and the activated expression product of the SakR gene induces the first promoter of the gene of interest,

thereby causing expression of the gene of interest;

wherein the first inducible promoter is a promoter different from the promoter from which the SakK gene and/or the SakR gene are expressed.

99. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 95, wherein

the first inducible promoter and gene of interest are on a first vector and the SakK gene and the SakR gene are operably linked to a constitutive promoter located on a second vector separate from the first vector.

100. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 95, wherein the SakK gene and the SakR gene are operably linked to a second inducible promoter.

101. (Amended) The gene expression system of claim 95, wherein the first inducible promoter and gene of interest are on a first vector and SakK gene and the SakR gene are operably linked to a second inducible promoter located on a second vector.

103. (Amended) A host cell comprising parts b), c) and d) of the gene expression system of claim 95.

106. (Amended) A method for producing a polypeptide or protein of interest comprising culturing a host cell comprising the gene expression system of claim 103 in a medium, adding an IF peptide to the culture, thereby inducing expression of the gene of interest to produce the polypeptide or protein of interest; and purifying the protein of interest from the culture.

107. (Twice Amended) An isolated nucleic acid comprising:

two repeated nucleotide sequences 5 to 10 nucleotides long and spaced 17 to 23 nucleotides apart, wherein the downstream member of said repeated sequence is located 30 to 38 nucleotides upstream from a -10 region of a bacterial gene,

wherein transcription of a coding nucleic acid sequence operatively linked to said isolated nucleic acid is activated by an expression product of a SakR gene of a *Lactobacillus* species that has been activated by an expression product of a SakK gene of a *Lactobacillus* species wherein said repeated nucleotide sequences are selected from the group consisting of residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:6, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:7, residues 7-14 and 30-38 of SEQ ID NO:8, residues 7-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:9, residues 7-8, 10-14 and 31-38 of SEQ ID NO:10.

112. (Amended) A gene expression system comprising the vector of claim 109 and further comprising a polynucleotide encoding an IF peptide of a *Lactobacillus* species, a polynucleotide encoding a SakK protein of a *Lactobacillus* species and a polynucleotide encoding a SakR protein of a *Lactobacillus* species.

Please add the following new claims:

--126. (New) The gene expression system of claim 70, in

which the SakK gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues 572 to 1918 of SEQ ID NO: 13.

127. (New) The gene expression system of claim 70, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues 1920 to 2666 of SEQ ID NO: 13.

128. (New) The gene expression system of claim 126, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues 1920 to 2666 of SEQ ID NO: 13.

129. (New) The isolated nucleic acid of claim 107, wherein the SakK gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues 572 to 1918 of SEQ ID NO: 13.

130. (New) The gene expression system of claim 107, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues 1920 to 2666 of SEQ ID NO: 13.

131. (New) The gene expression system of claim 130, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues 1920 to 2666 of SEQ ID NO: 13.

132. (New) The gene expression system of claim 112,

wherein the SakK gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues 572 to 1918 of SEQ ID NO: 13.

133. (New) The gene expression system of claim 112, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues 1920 to 2666 of SEQ ID NO: 13.

134. (New) The gene expression system of claim 133, in which the SakR gene comprises the polynucleotide sequence of residues 1920 to 2666 of SEQ ID NO: 13.

135. (New) The kit of claim 90, in which the host strain is *Lactobacillus sake* or *Lactobacillus plantarum*.--